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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000671

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/16/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KWMN](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: MADAME VICE PRESIDENT: HONDURAS' FIVE MAJOR
CANDIDATES CHOOSE FEMALE RUNNING MATES

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Classified By: Ambassador Charles Ford, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (C) Summary. In accordance with the law, on July 15, five Presidential candidates (two National Party and three Liberal Party) submitted their slates to their respective party headquarters in order to compete in the primary elections of November 16. All five candidates chose female running mates.

The women are smart and respected within their respective professions, and free from accusations of corruption and scandal. This could reflect a growing trend toward female politicians in the region, but also the growing female voting demographic and electoral reforms that require 30 percent female candidates. The bottom line, however, is that the next Vice President of Honduras will most likely be a woman.
End Summary.

12. (U) On July 15, all Presidential candidates had to submit their slates to their party headquarters in order to compete in the primary elections on November 16. Each candidate had to submit at least 150 slates (over 50 percent of the 298 municipalities), and each slate had to contain a minimum of 30 percent female candidates. Two candidates in the National party completed the prerequisites: National Party president Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo and former Honduran Ambassador to the United States Mario Canahuati. Three candidates came forward from the Liberal party: President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti, current Vice President Elvin Santos and television personality Eduardo Maldonado.

13. (U) In December 2007 Micheletti announced (many say prematurely) his running mate would be ousted Central Bank President Gabriela Nunez. This move seemed to garner positive support in many circles, and appears to have prompted the other candidates to also seek female running mates for their tickets. All the women chosen are considered intelligent technocrats -- none of them are hard-core politicians (except possibly Gabriela Nunez). They are all respected within their respective professional circles, and are not tainted by scandal or accusations of corruption.

Pepe Lobo takes Maria Antonieta Guillen de Bogran

14. (C) Guillen is a well respected National Party technocrat who is most well known for running former President Ricardo Maduro's education-focused NGO Ricardo Maduro Foundation for Education (FEREMA). She has a degree in business administration and has worked as a consultant and as the

director of the Honduran Institute of Tourism under the Callejas administration. She has a reputation for being smart and prudent and spending much of her time working for the poor. Her lack of involvement in politics thus far may be an advantage. (Note: She has cooperated extensively with USAID here in Honduras, and the USAID Director has said that our cooperation with FEREMA and other NGOs will suffer without her leadership. End Note.) Guillen is also very physically attractive, and the media is joking that her beauty will counterbalance Lobo's gruff appearance. (Note: Although used as a joke, Honduran voters respond extremely well to physically attractive candidates. End note.) Interestingly, Guillen is the sister of our Narcotics Affairs Section FSN Training Specialist, Lourdes Guillen, so the Embassy will continue to have a close relationship with her. She speaks good English, and is married with three children.

Mario Canahuati takes Rossana Guevara

¶5. (C) Rossana Guevara is a tough television journalist with Televiscentro's channel 5 news. She previously worked for many years as the NBC correspondent in Honduras, so she speaks excellent English. She had to resign her position in order to accept the slot as Canahuati's running mate. She is smart and gutsy and respected within the journalistic community, and voters who recognize her photo in the voting booth might be more likely to choose her. She does, however, often serve as a mouthpiece for her radical associate Juliette Handal, defending Handal's positions and the populist Patriotic Coalition (Coalicion Patriotica) that Handal leads. If Canahuati won, Guevara's aggressive personality could work against her if she tried to control the party too tightly.

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Roberto Micheletti takes Gabriela Nunez

¶6. (C) Nunez previously served as Central Bank President under the Zelaya administration, but was ousted in December 2007 ostensibly for disagreeing with Zelaya over monetary policy and debt management. Many say she was too responsible to work for him, and would not allow him to play with interest rates and currency values to serve his political interests. She is a well-respected economist, who worked for many years with the International Monetary Fund; she is also well-known for her service as Finance Minister at the time of Hurricane Mitch. However, a perceived lack of concern for her image and appearance may hurt her, especially in comparison to the more attractive Guillen. Since being chosen as Micheletti's running mate, she has kept an extremely low profile, but she told PolCouns on July 8 that she was ready to come out boldly as soon as the slates were turned in. She speaks good English, and is married with two teen-aged children.

Elvin Santos takes Maria Christina Gonzalez de Handal

¶7. (C) Gonzalez is a respected businesswoman and the current president of the Tegucigalpa Chamber of Commerce. Her husband is a medical doctor and she is a dentist, and together they have opened one of the most successful lasik surgery clinics in Honduras. She is considered smart and feisty, but she is not well-known to the general public. There may be a perceived conflict of interest if she does not quit her current job soon, as Guevara has done. The Chamber is also considered a weak organization, in the shadow of the larger National Council of Honduran Business (COHEP). She was part of the civic coalition that agitated successfully for Zelaya to reopen Tegucigalpa's Toncontin Airport for international flights.

Eduardo Maldonado takes Maria Martha Diaz Velasquez

¶8. (C) Diaz is most known for blowing the whistle on her husband's involvement in a scandal involving the sale of

visas to Chinese nationals (the "Chinazo") under the Reina administration. Her husband, a dual Nicaraguan-American citizen, allegedly got even with her by taking their children away during a visit to Disneyworld. He accused her of kidnapping and abuse and she spent a year in a Florida jail. Upon her return to Honduras, she was treated as a national heroine by Honduran women, and served for a short time as the Minister for Women's issues. All of these scandals have made her an extremely tough competitor. Despite this, she is probably the weakest candidate of the five, with less professional credibility (she has no paying job at this moment) and a feeling that she might be more trouble than she is worth. She is now divorced and has three children.

Comment

19. (C) It is possible that the trend in the region of female candidates has spread to Honduras. As an increasingly higher percentage of voters are women, it is increasingly difficult to ignore this segment of the population. The candidates have found that there is a wealth of qualified, professional women to fill these jobs, who all come with the added benefit of being mostly free of accusations of corruption and scandal. When Micheletti announced Nunez was his running mate, and the reaction was very positive, the other candidates jumped on the bandwagon. With the electoral reforms passed in December 2007, there is also the additional requirement that 30 percent of all slates be filled by women.

Unfortunately, many female politicians complain to us that the women are all placed at the bottom of the slates, so they have much less chance to be elected, or they are placed in "suplente" positions (alternate or back-up candidate who fills a job when the candidate is unable). The bottom line, however, is that barring some unforeseen circumstance, the next Vice President of Honduras will be a woman. End Comment.
FORD